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“WHAT IS A MERCIFUL HEART?”: AFFECTIVE-MOTIVATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE SECOND LOVE COMMAND

Rico Vitz

In this paper, I argue that Christ's second love command implies not only that people's volitions and actions be Christ-like, but also that their affective-motivational dispositions be Christ-like. More specifically, I argue that the command implies that people have aretaic obligations to strive to cultivate a merciful heart with the kind of affective depth described by St. Isaac of Syria in his 71st ascetical homily—i.e., one that is disposed to becoming inflamed, such that it is gripped by “strong and vehement mercy.”

In what is perhaps one of the most familiar passages of the Gospel, Christ explains what ought to be the central focus of human life. In response to a question from a Pharisee regarding the greatest commandment of the Law, He replies that the entirety of “the Law and the Prophets” hangs on two commandments. The first and greatest command is to love the Lord God with all one's heart, with all one's soul, and with all one's mind. The second command is to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt 22:26–40; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–27; cf. Gal 5:14).

Given the recurring presentation of these commandments in the Gospels, in the writings of St. Paul, and in the Christian tradition, *identifying* what ought to be the central focus of human life as taught by Christ seems like a rather easy task. *Understanding* and *explaining* Christ's teaching, however, is another matter. What exactly does the second love command entail? Two responses seem most prominent.

The first suggests that the scope of Christ's second love command entails certain kinds of operations of a person's cognitive and volitional faculties but not of a person's affective-motivational faculties. For instance, in his discussion of the second love command in *Justice in Love*, Wolterstorff offers a thoughtful account of the command as one requiring love as care but not requiring the cultivation of certain kinds of affective-motivational dispositions.¹ Segments of popular Christian discourse echo this theme,

¹See, e.g., Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 80–84, 98–99, 101ff., 116–118. It is worth noting that Wolterstorff suggests both that (1) it is “appropriate” for a person to have eros, or attraction love, for his or her neighbor, and that (2) compassionate love is the example Jesus offers for “what he is looking for” (*Justice in Love*, 109, 118). I'm not quite sure what to make of these



teaching, for example, that love “is not a feeling but a determined act of will, which always results in determined acts of self-giving.”² Thus, some understand the second love command as a precept demanding only certain types of cognition, volition, and action.

The second suggests that the scope of Christ’s second love command includes not only certain kinds of operations of a person’s cognitive and volitional faculties but also something concerning the condition of the person’s affective-motivational faculties. What is this “something”? There is little if any contemporary philosophical work that offers an answer to the question concerning what the command prescribes with respect to a person’s affective-motivational faculties.³ Thus, among contemporary Christians in general and among Christian philosophers in particular, there seem to be two views, neither of which affirms and explains the affective-motivational aspects of the second love command.

This state of affairs strikes me as rather problematic. In response, I will argue that the second love command prescribes not merely that people cultivate Christ-like *cognitive* and *volitional* dispositions and but also that they cultivate Christ-like *affective-motivational* dispositions. In fact, I am going to argue for an even stronger thesis: namely, that Christ commands Christians, as a rule, to strive to cultivate a merciful heart, one disposed to the kind of affective depth described by St. Isaac of Syria (c. 613–700 A.D.). In his 71st ascetical homily, St. Isaac asks rhetorically, “What is a merciful heart?” He answers as follows:

It is the heart’s *burning desire* for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing; and at the recollection and sight of them, the eyes of a merciful man pour forth *abundant tears*. From the *strong and vehement mercy* that grips his heart and from his

claims. When he says that it is “appropriate” for a person to have attraction love for one’s neighbor, is he saying that having attraction love for one’s neighbor is an aspect of human excellence? Similarly, when he says that compassionate love is what Jesus “is looking for,” is he saying that Christ is calling us to strive to embody compassionate love? If the answer to both of these questions is “yes,” then our views might be similar. I find it difficult, however, to square affirmative answers to these questions with Wolterstorff’s claims that “Jesus is silent about motives for love” and that motives do not matter (*Justice in Love*, 116–118). If the answer to either of these questions is “no,” then our views are more starkly different. In any event, *Justice in Love* is an important work, and I am grateful to an anonymous referee for calling it to my attention.

²MacArthur, “Is Biblical Love a Feeling or an Action?,” emphasis mine. In this, one hears an echo of Kant’s claim that love of others “considered as an inclination”—that is, as a motivating affection—is possible, “but cannot be commanded, for it is not in the power of any man to love anyone at command; therefore, it is only practical love that is meant in that pith of all laws” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, I.i.3). It is worth noting, though, that Kant’s view itself is much more nuanced. For instance, in *Metaphysics of Morals* II.i.1, §34, he claims that people do have a “conditional duty” to sympathize with others—that is, to share the feelings of others by an exercise of practical reason. Thus, there seems to be a sense in which Kant believes affections have some proper place in human action. How best to interpret Kant, however, is not essential to my argument.

³Howard-Snyder recognizes this broader scope of the command but denies knowing what the command entails concerning the operations of a person’s affective faculties—see, e.g., Howard-Snyder, “On These Two Commandments,” 17.

great compassion, his heart is *humbled*, and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason, he *offers up prayers with tears continually* even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they may be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles, because of the *great compassion* that burns without measure in his *heart in the likeness of God*.⁴

In other words, I am going to argue that the second love command prescribes not simply that people's actions be Christ-like, nor only that their minds and wills be Christ-like, but that their entire psyches, or souls, be Christ-like.⁵

I will develop my case for this thesis in three parts, as follows. In Section I, I will offer a scriptural and patristic interpretation of the second love command. In Section II, I will engage in a process of *fides quaerens intellectum* and offer a philosophical interpretation of the scriptural and patristic understanding of the second love command. In Section III, I will conclude by summarizing my argument and suggesting its implications for future research.

I. A Scriptural and Patristic Interpretation of the Second Love Command

What is the scriptural and patristic understanding of the second love command? Perhaps the most important way of seeking an answer to that question is by examining the kind of love for neighbor that was exemplified both by (1) Christ's life and teachings and (2) the lives and teachings of His disciples. With that method of inquiry in mind, let's begin by examining the evidence from sacred scripture and sacred tradition.

I.1 Evidence from Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition

As it relates to my thesis in this paper, one thing in particular stands out from the affective aspects of Christ's interactions with others: his compassion. When the Gospel writers say that Christ "had compassion on" others, they are not simply noting that He acted benevolently on behalf of others, but also that the so-called "irrational powers" of his soul were moved. For instance, they present Christ as a man who is moved with compassion (*splagchnizomai*) for those who are hungry (Matt 15:32; Mark 8:2), in debt (Matt 18:27), harassed and dejected (Matt 9:36), sick (Matt 14:14), disabled (Matt 20:34), infirmed (Mark 1:41), spiritually adrift (Mark 6:36), and grieving (Luke 7:13).

⁴St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, 491, emphasis mine. For an exposition of St. Isaac's teachings, see Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*; cp. Archimandrite Sophrony's comments on the teaching of St. Silouan the Athonite—Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 162–163.

⁵Notice that my thesis focuses on the *depth* not the *breadth*, or scope, of St. Isaac's conception of a merciful heart. Thus, the focus of my argument will be on the implications of the second love command for cultivating certain kinds of affective-motivational dispositions. Whether we can or ought to have such dispositions with respect to higher or lower beings—e.g., angelic powers or animals—is not something that I will address in this essay.

In two cases in particular, the Gospel writers explicitly highlight the fact that Christ was moved to tears. The first reveals the depth of Christ's compassion for those who are grieving. The contextual details of this case are instructive. The story is from St. John's Gospel. Jesus was on his way to the family of His friend Lazarus, who had been dead for four days. Before He reached the town, Lazarus's sister Martha met him. In an effort to console her, He reassured her that Lazarus will rise on the last day, and she confessed that He is the Christ. She then went and called her sister Mary, who rose quickly to meet Him. When Mary arrived, she fell at His feet crying. Then, St. John says, when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned, was troubled, and wept (John 11:17–35). What is particularly interesting is that the story reveals just how deep Christ's compassion was for those who were grieving: it moved him to tears.

The second is similar. St. Luke tells us that as Christ approached Jerusalem, where the citizens of the city would plead to have Him killed, He "wept over it, saying, 'If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!'" (Luke 19:41–42 NKJV). What is particularly intriguing about this story is that it reveals the depth of Christ's compassion not merely for sinners but for enemies who wish to do Him harm: it moves him to weep bitterly for their pride and hard-heartedness (cf. Jer 13:17).

Taken together, these two stories illustrate the profound depth and scope of Christ's compassionate love. It stirs Him deeply, to the point of tears, both for victims and for sinners, including His enemies.

One might be tempted to think these passages about the depth of Christ's compassion reveal a merely complementary feature to the second love command, but this is a temptation that one should resist. Consider the way that the Gospel of St. Luke elucidates the command. As I mentioned above, in the third Gospel, immediately after stating the love commands, Christ introduces the parable of the Good Samaritan to explain who one's neighbor is (Luke 10:29–37) and concludes by exhorting his listeners to "go and do likewise." Notice, however, that the Gospel presents the Christ-like figure in the parable (i.e., the Samaritan) as one who is moved with compassion (Luke 10:33). In a related and similar vein, the Gospel presents a Christ-like figure in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (viz., the father) as one who is moved with compassion (Luke 15:20). Thus, the only two times that the Gospel of St. Luke uses the term 'compassion' (*splagchnizomai*) in reference to someone other than Christ, it is to illustrate the kind of love one ought to have for others, both for victims and for sinners.

The New Testament does not merely present this deeply and compassionately motivated love as something reserved for Christ. Rather, it reveals such love as something embodied by His disciples. To take but one example, consider St. Paul. He continually counseled the Christians of Ephesus "with tears" for three years (Acts 20:31). He wrote to the Christians in Corinth "with many tears" that they might come to realize more

clearly his abundant love for them (2 Cor 2:4). He wept for the “enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things” (Phil 3:18–20).⁶

Moreover, Christ and His disciples not only manifested virtuous affective dispositions, like deeply and compassionately motivated love, they taught the cultivation of such dispositions as an important feature of the Christian way of life. For instance, Christ instructed his disciples to strive to ameliorate, if not to eradicate, passions that would impede them from loving others, like anger (Matt 5:22ff.), lust (Matt 5:27ff.), vainglory (Matt 18:1–4; Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48), worry (Matt 6:25–34; Luke 12:22–32; Matt 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14; cp. Matt 11:28–30; Matt 19:16–22; Mark 10:17–22; Luke 18:18–23), profane fear (Matt 10:26, 28; Luke 12:4), and unforgivingness (Matt 18:23–35). With this end in mind, He also taught His disciples to handle their material possessions in such a way that they would not improperly influence their hearts (Matt 6:19–21). In a similar vein, St. Paul encouraged his spiritual children to follow him as he followed Christ (cp. 1 Cor 11:1) in eradicating certain affective states and cultivating others. For instance, he exhorted them to “crucify all *self-indulgent passions and desires*” (Gal 5:25 JB, emphasis mine), to rid themselves of bitterness, anger, and malice (Eph 4:31), and to bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), so that they might be able to “put on . . . *tender feelings of compassions*” (Col 4: 12–13 Green’s Interlinear Bible, emphasis mine). Likewise, St. James commanded disciples of Christ to control their anger (Jas 1:19 JB) and to eradicate bitterness, enviousness, and ambition from their hearts (Jas 3:14–15, 4:1–3 JB). This command stemmed from his conviction that “genuine religion” includes both performing compassionate actions, like visiting “the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” and keeping oneself “unspotted from the world” (Jas 1:27 JB) in which the self-indulgent passions and desires reign (cp. Jas 3:14–15 JB). In essence, both Christ and His disciples present cultivating certain kinds of affective-motivational dispositions as a central aspect of the Christian way of life.

This twofold teaching of eradicating the “passions” and cultivating compassionate love continues to be prominent in the sacred tradition. More prominent examples of this can be found, for example, in the *Didache*, in the writings of the desert fathers,⁷ in St. John Cassian’s “On the Eight Vices,”⁸ in St. Maximos the Confessor’s “Four Hundred Texts on Love,”⁹

⁶St. Paul is an example of a person who is moved by what St. Peter of Damaskos calls a “divinely inspired sympathy, on behalf of others” (“A Treasury of Divine Knowledge,” 146). As such, he is a kind of secondary exemplar, following Christ, of the kind of compassionate love to which Christians are called.

⁷Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.

⁸Cassian, “On the Eight Vices,” 72–93.

⁹Maximos the Confessor, “Four Hundred Texts on Love,” 48–113. This theme re-occurs regularly in patristic literature—see, e.g., Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, vols. 1, 2, 3, and 4; Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*; Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.

and in St. John Damascene's "On the Virtues and the Vices."¹⁰ The call to cultivate a merciful heart, in particular, is also nicely articulated in St. Augustine's *City of God*, where he exhorts Christians not merely to perform works of mercy but to *be* merciful—that is, to be people who are disposed to have "a certain feeling of compassion in our hearts" whereby they feel for others and are motivated to act on behalf of their well-being.¹¹

What these examples, both of Christ and of His disciples, suggest is that being motivated by a merciful heart is not merely a complementary add-on to the Christian way of life. In fact, it is an essential aspect of that life, in general, and of a properly formed Christian character, in particular. Thus, in light of the presentation of Christ-like love in the Christian tradition, it would be a mistake to conceive of the second love command merely in terms of operations of an agent's cognitive and volitional faculties. Rather, an adequate conception of the love that Christ calls people to have of others must also include a description of an agent's affective-motivational dispositions—especially, e.g., the agent's dispositions to compassion and mercy.

1.2 Evidence for a "Merciful Heart"?

Some might worry that the evidence I have cited above does not support my thesis. The concern might be expressed roughly as follows: "The examples that you cite from the Gospels are merely *occasions* of Christ being moved to tears, and the examples that you site from the epistles are, at best, *recurrent occasions* of St. Paul being moved to tears. None of the evidence you have presented is of people being moved so deeply that they weep *continually*, as your thesis suggests, which is good since that would be impractical if not impossible."

This is an understandable worry, but it is one based on a misinterpretation of St. Isaac's claim and, consequently, of my thesis. St. Isaac is using two phrases in a way that allows for a metaphorical, if not hyperbolic, reading, as is common in ancient, near eastern, patristic literature. First, he is using the phrase "offers up prayers with tears" in a way that allows for a metaphorical reading—e.g., as a reference to a person being moved deeply in the kind of way that one is moved when he or she cries, even if no tears happen to form in his or her eyes.¹² Second, he is using the phrase "continually" not to indicate a person's ongoing occurrent affections (e.g., sadness, longing, etc.) but to indicate the kind of affective-motivational dispositions a person both has and frequently manifests. Thus, St. Isaac is using the term "continually" in a manner similar to the way that St. Paul uses the phrase "without ceasing" when he encourages his spiritual

¹⁰John Damascene, "On the Virtues and the Vices," 333–342. The work has been attributed to various authors, but identifying the author of the work is insignificant to my argument.

¹¹Augustine, *City of God*, IX.5; cp. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 30, a. 1.

¹²Cp. St. John Climacus's claim in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* regarding sorrow, sighing, and heaviness of heart performing the function of tears of repentance (195).

children to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17). Therefore, when St. Isaac describes a merciful heart, he does so using descriptively rich, poetical rhetoric to portray the Christ-like love that is presented both in sacred scripture and in sacred tradition.

1.3 Summary

In summary, the scriptural and patristic evidence suggests that to be a person with Christ-like love for one’s neighbor is to be a person with a heart that is disposed to being gripped by “strong and vehement mercy” for others. Or, in more philosophical prose, being a person who loves his neighbor like Christ includes being a person who possesses the kinds of affective-motivational dispositions that cause him or her (1) to feel *with* and, more importantly, *for* his or her neighbors, (2) to desire the good of his or her neighbors, and when possible (3) to act on behalf of his or her neighbor.¹³

II. A Philosophical Interpretation of the Second Love Command

Insofar as the lives and teachings of Christ and His followers, as described above, are adequate guides to understanding the scope of the second love command, we seem to have rather compelling evidence, both from sacred scripture and from sacred tradition, that the command has a cognitive, a volitional, *and* an affective-motivational aspect. In light of this evidence, Christian philosophers are faced with three important tasks. The first is a traditional instance of *fides quaerens intellectum*: namely, to offer a philosophical explanation of the scriptural and patristic understanding of the second love command. The second is a traditional instance of apologetics: namely, to offer a defense of this interpretation in light of objections. The third is an interdisciplinary, pastoral task concerning moral psychology: namely, to offer an account of how to cultivate such a merciful heart.

My aim in this section is to attend to the first of these tasks, in light of the first-millennium, philosophical milieu of the scriptural and patristic writers discussed in Section 1. I will do so in four steps. First, I will clarify the traditional Christian¹⁴ understanding of people’s obligations to cultivate affective-motivational dispositions. Second, I will clarify the traditional Christian understanding of God Incarnate as the principal

¹³In essence, the affective aspect of the kind of love that Christ commands Christians to cultivate, on my account, is akin to what Dan Batson calls “empathic concern” and what a number of other contemporary psychologists call “sympathy”—see Batson, “These Things Called Empathy” and “The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis”; cp. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*. It is not a specific emotional state with a particular valence, but a disposition to feel *with* and *for* others, such that we are naturally caused, e.g., not only to mourn with those who rightly mourn and to rejoice with those who rightly rejoice (Rom 12:15), but also to mourn for those who *wrongly rejoice* (cp. Luke 19:41–42) and to rejoice for those who *wrongly mourn*.

¹⁴I will be using the phrase “traditional Christianity” and related phrases to refer to the “mother tradition” of Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism—i.e., the first-millennium “Church of the Seven Councils.”

exemplar of virtue. Third, I will clarify how it is that we can ascribe affective-motivational dispositions to God Incarnate. Fourth, I will draw upon these clarifications to explain the types of affective-motivational dispositions that Christ calls people to cultivate in the second love command.

II.1 First Clarification: Commands regarding Affective Faculties

The thought of commanding a person to perform a bodily act or an act of will is a common feature of contemporary moral discourse. To some, however, the thought of commanding a person to cultivate certain affective-motivational dispositions might not seem to be. Consequently, for such readers, the traditional Christian understanding of Christ's second love command as having an affective-motivational aspect might seem odd. As I will show presently, however, this was not the case for those whose minds and modes of discourse were formed by the philosophical milieu of the scriptural and patristic writers.

Philosophers from Plato and Aristotle in Greece to Cicero and Seneca in Rome, as well as their medieval followers conceived of ethics in Greco-Roman aretaic categories.¹⁵ The general contours of their line of thought are widely familiar, but let me review them briefly to bring a few of the most salient features into focus. The principal conceptual foci were the end, or *telos*, of human life (i.e., *happiness*) and the excellent states of the soul by which people attain their end (i.e., *virtues*).¹⁶ The *soul* was thought to be composed of parts—rational and irrational.¹⁷ Each of these parts was thought to have its own distinctive virtues—intellectual and moral.¹⁸ Although moral virtue itself was thought to be a *state* of the soul, both *actions* and *feelings* were thought to be properly related to moral virtue. For instance, Aristotle says,

*Virtue of character . . . is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition. We can be afraid, for instance, or be confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, or in general feel pleasure or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well. But having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue. Similarly, actions also admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition. Now virtue is about feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency are in error and incur blame, whereas the intermediate condition is correct and wins praise, which are both proper to virtue.*¹⁹

¹⁵The point I am developing here follows Watson's suggestion that we can praise or blame moral agents from an "aretaic perspective," assessing the extent to which they have succeeded or failed with respect to standards of virtue, or excellence (*arete*). See Watson, "Two Faces of Responsibility"; see also Adams, "Involuntary Sins," and Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."

¹⁶See, e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.vi.15 [1107a].

¹⁷See, e.g., Plato, *Phaedrus* [especially 419a–445e]; *Republic*; cp. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.10–12; VII.1–10 [1117b–1119b; 1145a–1152a]; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* II.xxi.

¹⁸See, e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.13–II.i [1102a–1103a].

¹⁹Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.vi.10–12 [1106b], emphasis mine.

Aristotle's claims about the relationship between virtue and affective states are not idiosyncratic; they are implied by the aretaic categories he employs, as follows. On the Greco-Roman conception of human excellence described above, a fully virtuous person has both intellectual and moral virtues. In other words, a fully virtuous person has a soul that is excellent with respect to both its rational and its irrational parts. The irrational aspect of the soul is the locus of affective-motivational dispositions. Therefore, a fully virtuous person is one who has excellent dispositions even in this part of his or her soul. Thus, to those who are familiar with these Greco-Roman aretaic categories, it would be quite natural to conceive of a fully virtuous person as one who has excellent affective-motivational dispositions.

What's more, this kind of conception of the relation between virtue and affective-motivational dispositions was not limited to the Academic and Peripatetic schools of philosophy. In a related vein, the early Stoics conceived of *apatheia* as a two-fold virtue that resulted in agents who would not experience some affective states—namely, *pathe*, like anger, delight at the misery of others, fear, and sorrow—but would experience others—namely, *eupathe*, like wishing, joy, and watchfulness.²⁰ Since they regarded virtue not as an accident but as an achievement, they exhorted people to eradicate certain affective-motivational dispositions and to cultivate others. For instance, in *De Officiis*, Cicero instructs his readers to eradicate anger²¹ and presents himself as a model of how to deal with grief, by struggling against it.²² In essence, he exhorts his readers to cultivate *communitas*, “the deepest feeling in our nature.”²³ Seneca's “On Tranquillity of Mind” is a similar kind of work. Its focal point is the dispositional state in which the mind always pursues a steady and favorable course, is well-disposed towards itself, and views its condition with joy.²⁴ The purpose of the work is summarized nicely in the final paragraph. Seneca says,

Here are the rules, my dearest Serenus, by which you may preserve tranquillity, by which you may restore it, by which you may resist the vices that steal upon it unawares. Yet be sure of this—none of them is strong enough to guard a thing so frail unless we surround the wavering mind with earnest and unceasing care.²⁵

The reason that Stoics like Cicero and Seneca (1) exhorted people to eradicate certain affective-motivational dispositions and to cultivate others and (2) provided them rules for doing so is because they regarded

²⁰See, e.g., Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 114–115; Cottingham, *Philosophy and the Good Life*, 55–57; Pereboom, “Stoic Therapy in Descartes and Spinoza,” 594–598; Vitz, *Reforming the Art of Living*, 43.

²¹Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.89.

²²Cicero, *De Officiis*, II.2.

²³Cicero, *De Officiis*, II.159.

²⁴Seneca, “On Tranquillity of Mind,” II.4.

²⁵Seneca, “On Tranquillity of Mind,” XVII.12.

the cultivation of such dispositions as a human duty (*officium*). Thus, to those who are familiar with Stoic moral philosophy, it would quite natural to conceive of a fully virtuous person as one with duties (*officiis*) to cultivate virtuous affective-motivational dispositions.

Given that the Christian scriptural and patristic writers of the first millennium were familiar both with Greco-Roman aretaic categories and with Stoic moral philosophy, it is not at all surprising that they appropriated themes from these traditions to explain the ascetic life by which their disciples should pursue the scriptural commands to eradicate some affective-motivational dispositions and to cultivate others. I mentioned some examples of this in passing in Section I. Given my aims in this section, I will return to them now, highlighting in more detail examples of the traditional Christian appropriation of (1) the nature of the soul and, consequently, of virtue, (2) ascetic labors, and the need (3) to eradicate some affective-motivational dispositions and (4) to cultivate others.

The Natures of the Soul and, Consequently, of Virtue. Some of the clearest and most helpful expressions of the traditional Christian appropriation of the ancient Greek—and, more specifically, the tripartite—conception of the soul come from St. John Damascene, St. John Cassian, and St. Maximos the Confessor. St. John Damascene is particularly explicit. In “On the Virtues and the Vices,” he says, “In order to make it easier to recognize the passions in terms of the tripartite division of the soul we will classify them briefly. The soul has three aspects: the intelligent, the incensive, and the desiring aspect.” He then goes on to discuss the virtues and the vices within this psychological framework.²⁶ St. John Cassian uses a similar approach in “On the Eight Vices,” a work from which Christians later developed the “seven deadly sins.”²⁷ St. Maximos the Confessor does likewise in his “Four Hundred Texts on Love.” He notes that “[s]ome passions pertain the soul’s incensive power, and others to its desiring aspect.”²⁸ He goes on to explain the proper ordering of each of these aspects of the soul,

A soul’s motivation is rightly ordered when its desiring power is subordinated to self-control, when its incensive power rejects hatred and cleaves to love, and when its power of intelligence, through prayer and spiritual contemplation, advances toward God.²⁹

In essence, his discussion of the parts of the soul and their corresponding cardinal virtues is explicitly consistent with the tradition of the Greco-Roman aretaic framework.³⁰ What is particularly interesting, for present purposes, is not merely that he endorses the Greco-Roman aretaic conception of the soul and its virtues but that he says explicitly, “[T]he

²⁶Damascene, “On the Virtues and the Vices,” 337.

²⁷Cassian, “On the Eight Vices,” 72–93.

²⁸Maximos, “Four Hundred Texts on Love,” 60.

²⁹Maximos, “Four Hundred Texts on Love,” 102.

³⁰See, e.g., Maximos, “Four Hundred Texts on Love,” 78.

Lord has given us *commandments* which correspond to the powers of the soul."³¹

What are we commanded to do? We are commanded to engage in ascetic labors so that we can eradicate some affective-motivational dispositions, cultivate others, and ultimately enter more fully into union with God.

Ascetic Labors. The need to engage in ascetic labors for the purpose of healing the disorders of the soul is highlighted frequently in Christian patristic literature. For present purposes, I will focus on some examples from the sayings of the desert fathers and, again, from St. Maximos that highlight the need for traditional ascetic labors, like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Abba Nilus identifies prayer as "the seed of gentleness and the absence of anger . . . [and] a remedy against grief and depression."³² Abba Poemen similarly identifies prayer as a means of combating anger and lust.³³ Abba John the Dwarf identifies fasting as a means of combating the passions in general. He says, "If a king wanted to take possession of his enemy's city, he would begin by cutting off the water and the food and so his enemies, dying of hunger, would submit to him. It is the same with the passions of the flesh: if a man goes about fasting and hungry the enemies of his soul grow weak."³⁴ St. Maximos explains the role of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in the battle against the passions. He says, "Almsgiving heals the soul's incensive power; fasting withers sensual desire; prayer purifies the intellect and prepares it for the contemplation of created beings. . . . Gentleness keeps the soul's incensive power in a calm state; humility frees the intellect from conceit and self-esteem."³⁵

Eradicating Affective-Motivational Dispositions. The author of *The Didache* reiterates the scriptural commands regarding the passions which Christians are called to eradicate:

My child, flee from evil of every kind, and from everything resembling it. Do not become angry . . . Do not be jealous or quarrelsome or hot-tempered . . . do not be lustful . . . Do not be avaricious . . . Do not be arrogant or evil-minded.³⁶

The desert fathers and mothers do likewise. Abba Poemen claims, "God has given this way of life to Israel: to abstain from everything which is contrary to nature, that is to say, anger, fits of passion, jealousy, hatred and slandering the brethren."³⁷ Abba John the Dwarf, Abba Isidore the Priest, and Abba Nilus make similar claims.³⁸ St. John Cassian notes the

³¹Maximos, "Four Hundred Texts on Love," 62, emphasis mine.

³²Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 153.

³³Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 176; cp. 179, 92.

³⁴Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 86.

³⁵Maximos, "Four Hundred Texts on Love," 62; cp. Damascene, "On the Virtues and Vices," 333–342.

³⁶Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 150–151.

³⁷Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 176; cp. 179.

³⁸Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 86, 96, 153, 155; cp. 156.

particularly acute need to eradicate gluttony, lust, avarice, anger, dejection, listlessness, self-esteem, and pride.³⁹

Eradicating the “passions” is not an end. It is merely a necessary precondition for cultivating other affective-motivational dispositions.

Cultivating Affective-Motivational Dispositions. The Christian patristic tradition speaks of the need to cultivate fear of God⁴⁰ and compunction for sins, but more importantly, it speaks of the need to cultivate inner peace (*hesychia*) and dispassion (*apatheia*), as Abba Doulas, Abba Rufus, and St. Maximos suggest.⁴¹ The goal, however, is to reach the height of dispassion and to be perfected in love.⁴² St. Maximos highlights this point nicely, in the language of the Greco-Roman aretaic framework when he says, “When a man’s intellect is constantly with God, his desire grows beyond all measure into an intense longing for God and his incensiveness is completely transformed into divine love.”⁴³

The point of these examples is not to suggest that the Christian patristic tradition provides a faithful interpretation of Plato or Aristotle or Cicero or Seneca. Rather, it is to show that the Christian scriptural and patristic tradition appropriated Greco-Roman aretaic categories to explain what they understood to be divinely-ordained *officiis*, to borrow a term from Cicero, or “commandments,” to use the language of St. Maximos. In other words, in the mindset of the Christian scriptural and patristic tradition, people have *officiis* (i.e., duties) or obligations to cultivate certain affective-motivational dispositions.⁴⁴

Given that such obligations concern virtue (*arete*), I will refer to them as *aretaic* obligations. Thus, in keeping with the scriptural and patristic tradition, as described above, an “aretaic obligation” is an ethical imperative both to cultivate virtues and to perform genuinely virtuous actions. To the extent that someone satisfies such imperatives, he or she is the proper object of moral approbation, and to the extent that someone fails to satisfy such imperatives, he or she is the proper object of moral disapprobation. Therefore, on this traditional Christian account, the “oughts” implied by aretaic obligations are genuine moral imperatives;⁴⁵ they are not merely

³⁹Cassian, “On the Eight Vices,” 72–93.

⁴⁰See, e.g., Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 62, 156.

⁴¹See, e.g., Desert Fathers, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 55, 210; Maximos, “Four Hundred Texts on Love,” 53, 56.

⁴²Maximos, “Four Hundred Texts on Love,” 70.

⁴³Maximos, “Four Hundred Texts on Love,” 73; cp. 82.

⁴⁴For those who might have Kantian-inspired worries, two points of clarification might be helpful here. First, notice that an aretaic obligation to cultivate an affective-motivational disposition is akin to the kind of “conditional duty” to sympathize with others that Kant describes in *Metaphysics of Morals* II.i.1, §34, as noted above. Second, if the Kantian view is at odds with the traditional Christian view, it would seem more likely to be at odds not with *whether* we have obligations to cultivate certain affective-motivational dispositions but with the extent to which acting from those dispositions has *moral worth*.

⁴⁵Cp. Adams, “Involuntary Sins”; Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”; Watson “Two Faces of Responsibility.”

the kind of proper-function “oughts” that are not subject to moral praise or blame.⁴⁶

II.2 Second Clarification: Virtue as Likeness to God Incarnate

Understanding the philosophical milieu of the scriptural and patristic writers helps to elucidate why traditional Christians recognize in the second love command a call to cultivate certain kinds of affective-motivational dispositions. To understand the specific nature of that call, however, requires some reflection on the significance of the Incarnation for the nature of virtue and, hence, of ethical obligations, as I will now explain.

One key to recognizing the significance of the Incarnation for the nature and scope of aretaic obligations is to understand the traditional Greco-Roman doctrine that virtue is likeness to God. As a touchstone and point of departure, let's consider the doctrine as presented in Plato's works.⁴⁷ In *Laws*, Plato claims—contra Parmenides—that it is God, not man, that is the measure of all things.⁴⁸ Thus, on Plato's account, God is the “measure of” virtue such that a person who strives to be virtuous strives to be as much like God as he is able, as he claims in the *Republic* and suggests in *Phaedrus*.⁴⁹ Insofar as living virtuously is an end of life, human beings ought to “escape to heaven” by becoming like God, as he claims in *Theaetetus*.⁵⁰ Thus, according to Plato, human beings ought, insofar as they are able, to strive to acquire virtues and in so doing to become like God, as he suggests in *Phaedo*.⁵¹

How does understanding this traditional Greco-Roman teaching that virtue is likeness to God help us to understand the significance of the Incarnation for the nature and scope of aretaic obligations? I will explain this in more detail shortly, but by way of overview, here is the gist of the idea. Traditional Christianity rejects various theological, cosmological, and psychological elements of Greco-Roman philosophy—e.g., the polytheism of the ancient poets, the naturalistic theology of the Stoics, the Aristotelian conception of the universe as eternally existing, and the notion that the soul is imprisoned in the body,⁵² etc. It does not, however, reject this Greco-Roman ethical doctrine. Rather, it rejects the Greco-Roman *interpretation* of this doctrine. In essence, traditional Christianity is willing to grant that

⁴⁶Cp. Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*. Some might be tempted to claim that aretaic obligations are not “real moral” obligations. I think this is misguided, but a defense of the nature of that which is “really” moral or “really” ethical is not essential for my argument. For my purposes, it is sufficient to show that on the traditional Christian account, as described above, people have *officiis*, or duties, or obligations of the sort that I will refer to as “aretaic obligations.”

⁴⁷My brief summary of virtue as likeness to God in the ancients in this paragraph is indebted to Daniel Russell's helpful presentation in Russell, “Virtue as ‘Likeness to God’ in Plato and Seneca.”

⁴⁸Plato, *Laws* VI [716c–d].

⁴⁹Plato, *Republic* X [613a–b]; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* [248a].

⁵⁰Plato, *Theaetetus* [176a].

⁵¹Plato, *Phaedo* [80a–84b].

⁵²See, e.g., Plato, *Phaedo* [82d–e].

philosophers of Greece and Rome were right in characterizing virtue as likeness to God. What it denies is that they were right to characterize God as they did. On the traditional Christian account, virtue is in fact likeness not simply to God but to God Incarnate—likeness, that is, to the embodied second Person of the Trinity. Thus, rather than conceiving of virtue as likeness, e.g., to Plato's Good or to the Stoic's Zeus, traditional Christians conceive of virtue as likeness to Christ, Who is not only fully God but also fully human.

Having provided some sense of the essence of the traditional Christian understanding of the claim that virtue is likeness to God Incarnate, let me begin to explain the view in more detail. As I noted above, in the ethical frame of mind that shaped the discourse of the scriptural and patristic writers, virtues are excellent qualities of a kind of being. More specifically, virtues are those qualities by which individual members of a kind attain the *telos* of their kind. How does one determine the *telos* of a kind? Aristotle provides a characteristic expression of the philosophical milieu of the scriptural and patristic writers when he claims that "the function [*telos*] of a kind of thing is the same in kind as the function of an excellent individual of that kind."⁵³ That is, on the Greco-Roman view that informed traditional Christian ethical discourse, one identifies the *telos* of a kind of thing by observing an excellent member of that kind. In other words, in the ethical framework of Greco-Roman philosophy and of the scriptural and patristic writers, one identifies the *telos* of a kind of thing by identifying an *exemplar* of that kind.⁵⁴

Whether the kind of classical approach to virtue ethics that I have described above employs a satisfactory methodological strategy is not essential to my argument. What is essential to my argument is the fact that Greco-Roman virtue theories endorsed this methodological strategy and traditional Christianity did likewise, as follows. On the traditional Christian account, Christ is not only fully God but also fully human. Insofar as He is "fully human," He is neither some kind of super-human demigod nor merely one particular good human being among others. Rather, He is sinless and, hence, the "Just One" (*ton dikaion*) (cp. Acts 3:14; 7:52). That is, Jesus Christ is *the* ethically⁵⁵ excellent member of the human kind *par*

⁵³Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.vii.13–17 [1098a]. This idea is not unique to Aristotle. One sees something similar in Plato's references to "the Just Man" and in the Stoics' references to "the Sage," as well as in Confucian references to "sages" and "gentlemen"—see, e.g., Confucius, *The Analects*; Mencius, *Mengzi*. In this way, classical conceptions of virtue ethics are fundamentally (in Chisholm's terms) "particularist" rather than "methodist," insofar as they define moral exemplars by ostension rather than by identifying and applying a list of criteria (cp. Chisholm, "The Problem of The Criterion."). This methodological approach differs from that of many modern ethical theories that begin with a criterion, or set of criteria, for identifying right action, then develop an account of virtues, then try to determine if there exist any persons who exemplify the virtues.

⁵⁴Absent the Incarnation, this seems to present a significant problem for virtue ethics (cp. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*).

⁵⁵Note that the type of excellence in question is that of the soul, not that of the body.

excellence. Hence, it is Christ that is “the measure” both of happiness and of the virtues.⁵⁶ Thus, the traditional Christian scriptural and patristic conception of virtue bears a subtle relationship to the systems of Greek and Roman philosophy from which it appropriates various themes. The traditional Christian view affirms the Aristotelian doctrine that human excellence is fixed by the kind to which we belong, but it denies the Aristotelian teaching that human beings are merely members of a natural kind. Rather, on the traditional Christian conception, human beings are members of a natural kind in which each member can be divinized insofar as he or she is in union with God.⁵⁷ This teaching is evinced in the ancient Christian aphorism that what Christ is *by nature*, each Christian is called to be *by grace*. In this way, the traditional Christian view affirms something akin to, though clearly not identical to, the Platonic doctrine that virtue is likeness to God. On the traditional Christian view, virtue is likeness to God Incarnate—Jesus Christ, in Whom human nature is exemplified insofar as it is divinized. It is this instance of human nature that reveals our aretaic obligations, including our obligations to cultivate certain affective-motivational dispositions.

II.3 Third Clarification: The Affective-Motivational Dispositions of God Incarnate

At first glance, the claim that God Incarnate exemplifies our aretaic obligations to cultivate certain affective-motivational dispositions might seem rather problematic for the following reason. Against those who worshiped the Homeric deities, Plato and like-minded ancient Greco-Roman philosophers asserted that because God is incorporeal and immutable, He can neither suffer, nor have affective-motivational dispositions, nor (especially) have painful affective states like anger or jealousy. Since traditional Christianity endorses similar claims, one might reasonably worry that there is a problem ascribing affective-motivational dispositions to God. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the traditional Christian conception of Divine impassibility has to be interpreted not simply in light of philosophical analysis but also, more importantly, in light of the distinctively Christian conception of God, especially the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. It is in light of these teachings that one can rightly speak of God as having affective-motivational dispositions, as I will argue presently.

The distinctively Christian, Trinitarian conception of God, according to which God is one with respect to essence (*ousia*) and three with respect to persons (*hypostases*), requires more nuanced assessments of divine predication. For instance, when assessing what one can predicate of God, the doctrine of the Trinity requires the identification of the subject of which a property, or set of properties, is being predicated. That is, for any given

⁵⁶Cp. Plato, *Laws* VI [716c–d]; *Republic* X [613a–b]; *Phaedrus* [248a]; *Theaetetus* [176a]; *Phaedo* [80a–84b]; as well as Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7.xiv, as noted above.

⁵⁷Marissa Espinoza and I explain this more fully in Vitz and Espinoza, “The Divine Energies and the ‘End of Human Life.’”

case of divine predication, one must identify whether one is predicating the property, or set of properties, of the divine essence (*ousia*) or of a divine person (*hypostasis*), and if of a divine person, then of which.

Consider, for instance, the claim that God suffered on the cross. Can *suffered on the cross* be predicated of God? Three groups of people clearly denied that it could, for different reasons. One group, the gnostically-inclined Docetists, said that the answer is “no” because although Jesus Christ is God, He is not a human being. Thus, they claimed, despite appearances to the contrary, God did not suffer on the cross. A second group, the Arians, said that the answer is “no” because Jesus Christ is not of the same substance (*ousia*) as God the Father and, hence, is not really God. Thus, they claimed, it is not right to say that God suffered on the cross. A third group, the Nestorians, tried to find an alternative that would satisfy these kind of Gnostic and Arian concerns by arguing that in the body crucified on Calvary, there were two persons (*hypostases*): Jesus, the Son of Mary, and the second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God.⁵⁸ Thus, they claimed, although it would be right to say that a human person, Jesus, suffered on the cross, it would not be right to say that God, the Second Person of the Trinity, suffered on the cross.

None of these answers, however, is consistent with traditional Christianity. Contra Docetism, traditional Christianity affirms that Jesus Christ is truly a human being. Contra Arianism, traditional Christianity affirms that Jesus Christ is truly God. Contra Nestorianism, traditional Christianity affirms that Jesus Christ is one person. In the fuller development of its anti-Nestorian view, traditional Christianity also argues (1) contra Monophysitism, that Jesus Christ has two natures (*phuseis*), (2) contra Monoenergism, that He has two kinds of energies (*energeiai*), or faculties,⁵⁹ corresponding to his two natures, and (3) contra Monothelitism, that Jesus Christ has two wills (*thelemata*), corresponding to his two natures and two kinds of energies.⁶⁰

In short, on the traditional Christian account, one person suffered on Calvary: Jesus Christ. Insofar as He is fully God, that one person has a divine nature, divine energies, and a divine will. Moreover, insofar as He is fully

⁵⁸It might be helpful to make two observations on this point. The first is that the historical debates about whether Christians ought to refer to Mary as (1) the *Theotokos*, or Mother of God, or as (2) the *Christotokos*, or Mother of Christ, is inherently and deeply Christological. The second is that the Church's liturgical and doctrinal commitments to honor Mary as the *Theotokos* express an explicitly anti-Nestorian Christology.

⁵⁹St. John Damascene distinguishes a number of different uses of the term “energy.” For present purposes, it will suffice to highlight three. He says that the term is used to refer to (1) a faculty, or power, such as the will (*thelesis*), by which a being moves itself, (2) the activities of these faculties, or powers, like specific acts of will such as wish (*boulesis*) or use (*chresis*), and (3) natural passions, like hunger and thirst. Thus, the term is used to refer to faculties, to activities, and to passions that are in accordance with the natural function of these faculties. See, e.g., Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, II.23. I am focusing on the first of these uses since that is the one relevant to understanding the term “Monoenergism.”

⁶⁰In “The Divine Energies and the ‘End of Human Life,’” Marissa Espinoza and I explain some of the implications of these Christological details both for an understanding of human nature and, consequently, for ethics.

human that one person has a human nature, human energies, and a human will. Therefore, since it is persons—rather than natures, energies, or wills—that suffer, it is right to say that God suffered on the cross. What might have seemed unthinkable prior to the Incarnation has become thinkable thereafter. More importantly, for present purposes, what might have seemed unspeakable prior to the Incarnation has become speakable thereafter.⁶¹

With these traditional Christian clarifications in mind, we can resolve the apparent problem with which we began. Just as we can properly predicate suffering of God Incarnate, in the person of Christ, we can also predicate affective-motivational states and dispositions of God Incarnate, in the person of Christ. To deny this would be to deny traditional Christology. Thus, God Incarnate not only has but, more importantly for the purpose of my argument, exemplifies affective-motivational dispositions.⁶²

II.4 A Philosophical Interpretation of the Second Love Command

So far in this section, I have offered three clarifications concerning traditional Christianity in light of the philosophical milieu of the scriptural and patristic writers. First, people have aretaic obligations to cultivate certain affective-motivational dispositions. Second, the principal exemplar of such dispositions is God Incarnate, as revealed in Christ. Third, we can ascribe such dispositions to God Incarnate insofar as Christ is both fully God and, more importantly for our purposes, fully human. I will now draw upon these clarifications to explain the types of affective-motivational dispositions that Christ calls people to cultivate in the second love command.

The traditional Christian affirmation of Christ's humanity—especially the rejections of Monoenergism and of Monotheletism—entails that He has not only divine energies, or faculties, but also human energies, or faculties. In short, it entails not merely that Christ is human but also that He is *fully* human. This means that Christ has a tripartite human psyche, consisting of a rational faculty, and two irrational faculties. Thus, it entails that with respect to his humanity, Christ has a noetic faculty, an incensive faculty, and an appetitive faculty. In principle, each of these faculties can function excellently or poorly—i.e., virtuously or viciously. Since Christ is sinless and, thus, entirely morally praiseworthy, it follows that even His irrational faculties—i.e., his incensive and appetitive energies—function excellently. Therefore, on the traditional Christian account, Christ not only manifests but exemplifies both intellectual virtues, like wisdom, and moral virtues, like courage and temperance.

Moreover, moral virtues⁶³ are “about feelings” such that the person who possesses these character traits has the right kinds of feelings “at the right

⁶¹Thus, the Incarnation changed the way that human beings could depict God both in language, as I have noted here, and in images, as St. John Damascene argues in his defense of icons (Damascene, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*).

⁶²Cp. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*; Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*.

⁶³Since they are not essential to my argument, I will set aside the intellectual virtues for the time being.

times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way," as is "proper to virtue."⁶⁴ Thus, on the traditional Christian account, Christ has not only virtuous thoughts and volitions but also virtuous affective-motivational dispositions. Since virtue is likeness to God Incarnate, it follows that human beings have aretaic obligations to have not only virtuous thoughts and volitions but also virtuous affective-motivational dispositions. Thus, insofar as people are called to manifest Christ-like love, they are called not only to *think* of and to *act* on behalf of their neighbor as Christ does, but also to *feel with*, to *feel for*, and to *desire* the good for their neighbor as Christ does.

In essence, the obligations implied by the second love command are not limited to a particular subset of energies, or faculties, such that, e.g., a person merely has a duty to conform his or her mind and will to God's laws. Rather, the obligations implied by the second love command are for the *whole* person, such that he or she has a duty to unite all of his or her energies with God, living thereby in continual synergy with Christ—literally, *energizing with* God Incarnate. In other words, the second love command implies that people have obligations to be like St. Paul who describes himself as "striving according to His [i.e., Christ's] working, who works in me mightily" (Col 1:29 NKJV; cp. Gal 2:20).⁶⁵ Insofar as they are able to do so, they are able to love God with all their heart and all their souls (Matt 22:37; Mark 12:29; Luke 12:27) and, consequently, to embody the merciful character of God Incarnate.

II.5 Summary

In sum, the second love command calls for people to cultivate both the virtues and the properly related affective-motivational dispositions that naturally manifest themselves in caring actions. In other words, the second love command calls for people to strive to cultivate not merely cognitive and volitional excellence but also the kinds of affective-motivational excellence exemplified by Christ in the Gospels and reflected in the lives of His disciples, as described above. More precisely, it calls for people to strive to cultivate hearts that are, in the words of St. Isaac of Syria, gripped by "strong and vehement mercy," such that they are disposed (1) to feel

⁶⁴This clarification is helpful for understanding the scope of the second love command. Christ is calling people to cultivate affective-motivational dispositions to feel deeply with their "neighbors," that is those within (what Hume calls) their "narrow circle" of social intercourse, as illustrated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. He is not, e.g., calling people to have intense affective responses to every human being who is currently suffering.

⁶⁵For excellent explanations of the divine energies, see Bradshaw, "The Vision of God in Philo of Alexandria"; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*; Bradshaw, "The Concept of the Divine Energies"; and Bradshaw, "The Divine Glory and the Divine Energies." For philosophical accounts of human union with the divine energies, see Jacobs, "An Eastern Orthodox Conception of Theosis and Human Nature"; and Vitz and Espinoza, "The Divine Energies and the 'End of Human Life.'" For patristic and theological accounts, see Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*; Lossky, "Redemption and Deification"; Maximos, "Four Hundred Texts on Love"; and Maximos, *On the Difficulties of the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vols. 1 and 2.

with and for their neighbors, (2) to desire the good of their neighbors, and when possible (3) to act with care on behalf of their neighbors.

III. Conclusion

In the foregoing sections, I examined evidence from sacred scripture and sacred tradition concerning the kind of love implied by the second love command, as evinced by the lives of Christ and his disciples. I then offered a *fides quaerens intellectum* philosophical explanation of this scriptural and patristic understanding of the command. To the extent that I have succeeded, I have shown that Christ calls people to strive to cultivate merciful hearts disposed with the kind of affective depth described by St. Isaac of Syria in his 71st ascetical homily—i.e., ones that are disposed to becoming inflamed, such that they are gripped by “strong and vehement mercy.” To have made a compelling case that people have aretaic obligations of this sort is an important accomplishment, both in and of itself and, more importantly, for the philosophical work that it invites.

Let me close by making three brief observations about the philosophical work that remains to be done, in light of the three tasks I identified at the beginning of Section II. First, the kind of love that Christians are obligated to strive to cultivate is that of which traditional Christianity, in general, and the neptic fathers and mothers, in particular, speak repeatedly. So, the position for which I have argued is not an innovative one. Rather, it is a corrective one that calls us to re-examine our heritage and to re-articulate our ethical obligations both in light of and in terms of that heritage. Second, the philosophical explanation of the scriptural and patristic understanding of the command that I have provided faces challenges on a number of fronts—e.g., metaphysical, epistemological, and metaethical. So, as one would rightly expect of any philosophical thesis, it will require a multi-faceted defense. Third, the work to which Christian philosophers are obliged is not, and ought not be, merely theoretical. However important such work might be, eventually Christian philosophy must also tend to the interdisciplinary, pastoral work that helps people live well.⁶⁶ To the extent that Christian philosophy tends to neglect these tasks or perhaps even to denigrate affective-motivational aspects of the second love command, it will tend to promote a misunderstanding of human nature or, worse yet, to support ecclesiastical cultures that fail to lead people into the rich depths of Christian salvation.⁶⁷

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⁶⁶For examples of interesting philosophical and theological work being developed along these lines, see Cuneo, *Ritualized Faith* and Fagerberg, *On Liturgical Asceticism*.

⁶⁷I would like to thank Uche Anizor, Robert Audi, Aaron Cobb, Tom Crisp, Gregg TenElshoff, Bruce Foltz, Liz Hall, Frances Howard-Snyder, George Hunsinger, Chad Meister, Stephen Munzer, Mark Murphy, Yujin Nagasawa, John Nightengale, Steve Porter, Ellen Ross, Eric Silverman, and two anonymous referees for this journal, as well as audiences at the University of Birmingham, the Society of Christian Philosophers' Pacific Regional Conference,

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